

The correlation between language and wellbeing:

preliminary data from a global survey on
language revitalization

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ICLDC-5 • March 4, 2017

Introduction

- Global Survey of Language Revitalization Efforts
 - Smithsonian Institution's Recovering Voices initiative and University of Hawai'i at Mānoa - Linguistics
 - Basic research began in Summer 2014
- Examines distribution and trends in language revitalization efforts worldwide
 - What strategies are effective under what circumstances?
- What can this contribute to our understanding of correlations between language and wellbeing?

Language and wellbeing

- Whalen, Moss & Baldwin. 2016. Healing through language: Positive physical health effects of indigenous language use. F1000Research 2016, 5:852.
- Cite emerging evidence of correlation between ancestral language use and physical (and mental) wellbeing
 - Consider diabetes, suicide rates, smoking and substance abuse, violence, and graduation rates, etc.
 - Focus is on US, Canada, Australia & New Zealand
- Global Survey allows us to put these studies into broader context
 - Research question: **are revitalization practitioners aware of correlation?**

Overview of Presentation

- Survey
 - Design
 - Key questions
- Results
 - Pilot survey
 - Full scale survey
- Discussion and conclusions

The Survey

- Phases of Development of Survey
 - Phase 1: Directory
 - about 230 initiatives
 - informed questionnaire used in Pilot Survey
 - Phase 2: Pilot Survey
 - 25 questions
 - Versions in English and Spanish
 - Sent to ~40 programs
 - Phase 3: Full Survey (on-going)
 - <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LanguageRevitalization-Eng>
 - Flyers in your conference packets!

Phase 2: Pilot Survey

- 30 responses (25 different lgs)
- Geographic spread
 - 2 African languages
 - 4 European languages
 - 4 Asian languages
 - 2 Australian languages
 - 13 languages of the Americas
- Ranged from dormant and awakening languages to ones with more than 1 million speakers

Phase 2: Pilot Survey (cont'd)

- Language and wellbeing data:
 - No respondents overtly recognized a correlation between language use and wellbeing
 - Even the five from US tribes that may have been exposed to Whalen et. al. (2016)
- Two possible interpretations:
 1. The pilot survey design might not encourage respondents to express their views about their language's connection to wellbeing
 2. The correlation is less salient to revitalization practitioners than to academics.

Phase 3: Full Survey

- 30 questions mix of multiple choice and free response
 - no leading questions
- Applicability
 - geographically neutral
 - inclusive of wide range of language vitality situations
 - Inclusive of efforts at any stage/of any size
- English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Russian, Chinese, (Arabic in the works, possibly Hindi)

- Survey design
 - Sect. 1 Basic info
 - Sect. 2 About the revitalization efforts
 - Q6
 - Q8
 - Q 10-12
 - Sect. 3 Revitalization activities
 - Sect. 4 How are the activities doing?
 - Sect. 5 Wrapping up
 - Q 25-26

- About the revitalization efforts
 - Qualitative Questions

Q6. How did the revitalization efforts begin?
Please explain. We are especially interested in learning what the motivation was, who got the efforts started and how they went about it.

Q8. Please provide a general description of the revitalization efforts?

Q10. What are the main objectives of the revitalization efforts?

Q12. Please comment on how you are gauging each objective.

- Closing questions
 - Qualitative Questions

Q25. Why is the revitalization of your language important?

Q26. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Results

(responses cited with respondents' permission)

- 105 total responses (English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese) by Feb. 2, 2017
- Americas, Asia, Oceania, Europe, Africa
- Response rates
 - 66 responses to at least one key question
- Response types
 - 4 respondents discussed the language-wellbeing correlation explicitly
 - Several hinted at it
 - Other correlations articulated between language and...
 - preservation of traditional knowledge (discussed in 12 responses)
 - human rights
 - boost prestige/revert negative attitudes toward language or community

Language and wellbeing

- Klallam (USA)

Q10. What are the main objectives of the revitalization efforts?

increase the pride, self esteem, and empowerment of community members.

Q12. Please comment on how you are gauging each objective.

drop out rates, incarceration rates, suicide rates, standardized test scores.

- Halkomelem (USA)

Q25. Why is revitalization of your language important?

*...Language supports everything: **health**, identity, connection to the past, ones ancestors, generations before and after, and fundamentally, ways of being human.*

- Kristang (Singapore)

Q25. Why is revitalization of your language important?

*It is a part of not just my heritage but the heritage of my relatives and now friends that I have made as a result of the initiative; it **increases their sense of well-being***

- Keres (USA)

Q10. Why is revitalization of your language important?

*Keres Children's Learning Center (KCLC) strives to reclaim our children's education and honor our heritage by using a comprehensive cultural and academic curriculum to assist families in nurturing Keres-speaking, **holistically healthy**, community minded, and **academically strong** students.*

Hints at wellbeing

- Baniva (Venezuela)

Q10. What are the main objectives of the revitalization efforts?

...propiciar el diálogo intercultural entre indígenas y no indígenas con el fin de ir superando la situación de desventaja y discriminación de las lenguas y culturas indígenas...

‘...to foster an intercultural dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous people in order **to overcome the disadvantages and discrimination** that indigenous languages and cultures face.’

Translation by G. Pérez Báez

- Wampanoag (USA)

Q25. Why is revitalization of your language important?

*By revitalizing the language we can begin to **repair the centuries of colonial assault** on Wampanoag language use and cultural practices. Plus, when a language is revived, it **lifts up** the entire community...*

Other connections to wellbeing:

- Mixteco (Mexico)

Q8. Please provide a general description of the revitalization efforts.

Estamos preparando materiales de salud para interpretes.

‘We are **producing health materials** for interpreters.’

Translation by G. Pérez Báez

- Programs from directory (Botswana)

- The Naro Language Project (Naro language) and The Kamanakao Association (Shiyeye language)

- Promotion of language (creation of lg. materials etc.)
- Promotion of community health (health-oriented events etc.)

Discussion and Conclusions

- Positive
 - definite improvement over pilot where ***no*** responses about language-wellbeing correlation were articulated
- Why still low numbers?
 - Survey could still be suppressing answers
 - However, open ended questions are plentiful
 - Survey must avoid leading questions
 - **We propose that the correlation between language and wellbeing is less salient to revitalization practitioners than it is to researchers focused on this topic**

- Yet, a measurable correlation between language and wellbeing would offer strong justification for language revitalization and could help draw support for it.
 - Especially in cases where the relevance of language has eroded

- Southern Zapotec response

Q26. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Muchos hablantes piensan que si la lengua desaparece no es importante.

‘Many speakers think that **it is not important whether the language disappears.**’

Translation by G. Pérez Báez

- Where to go from here
 - Collect more information:
 - The survey remains open and the overall results might change
 - If trends remain, a follow-up questionnaire with specific wellbeing questions might be advisable
 - Outreach:
 - Our current results suggest that more outreach is necessary to disseminate information of the type cited in Whalen et al. (2016).
 - community leaders
 - educators
 - revitalization practitioners
 - health workers – stress importance of language

References

- Coe, K., Attakai A., Papenfuss M., et al. 2004. Traditionalism and its relationship to disease risk and protective behaviors of women living on the Hopi reservation. *Health Care Women Int.* 25(5): 391–410.
- Whalen, Doug H., Margaret Moss, and Daryl Baldwin. 2016. Healing through language: Positive physical health effects of indigenous language use [version 1; referees: 1 approved with reservations]. *F1000 Research* 2016 5:852 (doi: 10.12688/f1000research.8656.1).
- Anonymous survey responses

Please take the survey!

- Flyers in your conference packets!
 - English survey:
<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LanguageRevitalization-Eng>
 - Other versions available here: <http://tinyurl.com/hq3wxho>
- **I will be at Table #XX to help you fill out the survey!**
- Please spread the word!
 - We are lacking in responses from **African, Asian and Australian** contexts!
- Contact me with questions: vogelr@si.edu

1. Join Recovering Voices in learning about language revitalization efforts around the world!

The Recovering Voices initiative of the Smithsonian Institution and the Linguistics Department at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa are carrying out a survey of language revitalization initiatives worldwide. We are asking practitioners such as yourself to share their experience with us so that we may all learn from each other.

This survey has 30 questions about revitalization activities and we estimate it will take about a half hour of your time. The questions will be presented to you in 8 consecutive pages, so please make sure to navigate through all 8 pages.

All responses are optional to give you the flexibility to provide us the information that is available to you and that you are comfortable sharing. All information requested in this survey is about revitalization **initiatives** and not about individuals. The information you provide will allow us to do a comparative analysis of the factors that may improve the outcomes of revitalization efforts.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact **vogelr@si.edu**.

Many thanks in advance!